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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000108

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT "100 PERCENT WITH THE PRESIDENT" ON IRAQ

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C/NF) Summary: During a courtesy call by visiting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Mary Beth Long, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah expressed full agreement with the President's strategy for bringing stability to Iraq. The Foreign Minister was also pleased that the GCC states plus Jordan and Egypt had all endorsed the objectives of the President's "courageous decisions," and had been particularly comforted by Secretary Rice's explanation of the political dimensions of the strategy during their session in Kuwait January 16th. He cautioned that the U.S. should not be "defeated by a short vision of success" and said that history will show that liberation of Iraq will "lay down a new foundation" for a better Middle East. He noted that an important unknown in the new strategy is whether Iraqi PM Al-Maliki will demonstrate the will and ability to bring about a genuine reconciliation process. The Foreign Minister expressed concern about rumors of Mahdi forces moving into Southern Iraq, partly to avoid the U.S. campaign in Baghdad. The Minister reiterated Kuwaiti hopes that the President's efforts to bring about a two state solution for Israel and Palestine would bear fruit. He also cautioned against playing into the hands of extremists in the region by identifying them too closely with Islam -- counseling that we simply refer to them as criminals and terrorists, vice "Islamic extremists." On bilateral issues, the Foreign Minister once again pressed for early action on release into GOK custody of the remaining four Kuwaitis at Guantanamo. (End summary)

"Stay the New Course"

12. (C/NF) Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah held a wide-ranging discussion with PDAS/D Mary Beth Long, Ambassador LeBaron and senior members of PDAS Long's delegation (in Kuwait for the Joint Military Commission Meeting) that touched on a number of regional issues. Dr. Mohammed gave high marks to the Administration's new strategy for Iraq. He prefaced his remarks on Iraq by noting that the situation in Iraq should not be viewed through the optic of the Vietnam conflict, which he characterized as a superpower confrontation. He said that he agreed one hundred percent that defeat would lead to civil war and instability in the region. He said the President had made a "courageous decision" and all GCC countries endorsed the objectives of the new Iraq policy. He commented that when people in Kuwait call Iraq a quagmire, his response is that indeed the United States is trying to pull Iraq out of its quagmire -- "We thank you for your effort to prevent Iraq's break-up and stop the bloodshed."

13. (C/NF) Later in the discussion, the Foreign Minister expanded on his initial comments about Iraq. He questioned whether Prime Minister Al-Maliki "will be able to exercise authority" over all factions and able to reach out to Sunnis in order to "get the reconciliation process moving." He said, "Your military will do the job but it will be the political strategy that will produce eventual success." He urged the U.S. to "stay the new course," saying that U.S. actions will "lay down a new foundation" for stability. He said that a lot had been learned from earlier mistakes. He congratulated Secretary Rice for her clear and convincing explanation of the political dimensions of the new strategy for Iraq. He said the Foreign Ministers of the GCC 6 plus Egypt and Jordan for the first time saw the political dimension of the strategy in their session on the 16th with Dr. Rice, and "now there is a great deal of comfort" among them. He said that Kuwaitis appreciated very much what President Bush had said regarding standing by U.S. allies in the region in his speech on Iraq and in the State of the Union message.

What About Iran?

14. (C/NF) In the context of a question about Iran, Dr. Mohammed noted reports that Al-Mahdi forces may be moving to southern Iraq in order to avoid confrontation in Baghdad. He said, "we are very concerned about southern Iraq" and asked whether the plan to deal with Baghdad will have an impact on or ramifications for southern Iraq -- "Will some insurgency forces re-locate to the south?" He also asked PDAS Long how to read the build-up of U.S. naval forces in the Gulf. PDAS Long said that this build-up is an indication of the seriousness of our commitment to defend our friends.

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Dealing with Extremism without Fueling It

15. (C/NF) The Kuwaiti minister commented briefly on Ayman al-Zawahiri's presentation on Al-Jazeera about defeating U.S. forces, noting its timing and the ability of such a group to easily access this media. In a discussion of how to deal with such extremism, the Foreign Minister said, "what matters is how you (U.S.) respond to it." He said the extremists are trying to draw the United States into a wider confrontation with the Muslim world, while "the overwhelming majority of Muslims believe in Islam as a religion of peace and brotherhood" with others. The Foreign Minister said that the "Islamophobia" in the U.S. helps the extremists -- it gives them tactical advantage and helps them enlarge their base. He said use of such terms as "Islamofacism" plays right into their hands and puts us on the defensive. "They should be called criminals and terrorists" -- not "Islamic radicals" or "Islamic terrorists."

Guantanamo a Blot on Bilateral Ties

16. (C) When asked about bilateral issues, the Kuwaiti FM said, "they are very strong, very good." However, he added, that the U.S. can be its worst enemy in terms of public image. He emphasized that Guantanamo does "not help at all." He once again appealed for rapid U.S. action to return the final four Kuwaiti detainees being held at Guantanamo.

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